

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Rural Electrification Administration
Washington, D. C.

Farewell Address by Dora B. Haines to the REA Staff
December 1, 1948

When Mrs. Haines, after 13 years of service in REA, retired from Government service, the Administrator asked her to talk to the entire staff at a special meeting in Jefferson Auditorium. In his invitation to her, he said:

"The breadth of vision and the unfailing spirit of devotion which you have brought to this program have had an ever widening influence on the thinking and attitudes of many people in the Federal service and throughout rural America. I am sure that what you will have to say to us in REA on this occasion will be well worth remembering in the days and years ahead."

The Administrator himself presided at the meeting. As usual, Mrs. Haines spoke from the heart, feelingly. And this one time her talk was taken down verbatim, for the benefit of her many friends throughout the REA program who will not want to miss what she had to say on this occasion.

When Mr. Wickard's memo came to my desk I was very deeply touched, as I am sure any of you would have been. And then I read on the following day that he would like to have me talk about REA as I see the program. Well, I have watched the Washington scene for over thirty years, Mr. Wickard, and I really mean watched it, and I shall never cease to wonder at the program which had its beginning, its official beginning, on May 11, 1935, that an agency could be set up that would reach so far, reach so many people, and reach down deep into their lives...millions of them we hoped. That was something that doesn't often happen in any of the parliaments of the world.

I feel very much, when I think of the hundreds of thousands, and now the millions, of people who have benefited by this program, as the Virginia woman did who said to me one day, "Why, Mrs. Haines, do you know when the lights were turned on here in my neighborhood on Christmas Eve, we just got into our cars and we rode up and down these highways here just to see the lights." The amazement and wonder and joy in that woman's face I shall never forget. I have felt many times very much as she felt, when I have traveled over this country and known of the hundreds of thousands of farm homes being lighted by the people who have worked so faithfully in this program for the past thirteen years.

Mr. Wickard, I have very little to say in the matter of "telling off" anybody in this program. It would be foolish to say that no mistakes had been made in any way, but I see no reason why anyone should regret his mistakes because out of them has grown one of the most wonderful

projects ever started by any Government for any people anywhere in the world.

Just a few days ago I had as guests at our table on Thanksgiving three people from Pakistan, and we were very much interested in what they had to say about the conditions of their country. A gentleman was asking me about various things that were happening in rural America, about our own farm, for instance. He said, "This is fine, but of course we never can have electricity." I said, "My dear man, twenty years ago very few people in the United States thought that farmers could have electricity." He could hardly believe that.

I think that is one thing for all of you who remain in this work to remember -- that the things we do in this program, the kind of rural America we help to build is the kind of rural America which people all over the world will come to look at and make it a pattern for their own countries.

I am thinking of the jobs that have been done, the techniques that have been established by our Engineering, our Management, our Applications and Loans, our Finance and Power Divisions. Those techniques for doing those particular jobs have been fairly well established by this time and in these years -- and we must never forget that we fought in a war, either. In these years the top fifty percent of the people of rural America have had their lives benefited by the work done by you people here, benefited beyond what most people realize who have not lived on the farm at sometime in their lives. For the bottom fifty percent (or nearly that) of the people who are yet waiting for the electric lines to come to their doors there are many new techniques that will have to be evolved and they have to do not so much with engineering and all of these other things. They have to do with working with people, provided that you are all interested, as I know you are, Mr. Wickard, in making these cooperatives secure and seeing that ownership shall remain in the hands of the rural people themselves.

There is a new job to be done and I think not too much time can be spent in getting at it in a vigorous way. I am speaking of an educational job which will go out to the members of these cooperatives, an educational job that will show them that they have one of the finest techniques for better living within their own hands when they learn to use electricity efficiently and productively. But we must go far beyond that to bring security to these cooperatives. They must learn the value of working together. They must learn what the power is within their own hands. They must learn that it is not enough to make any farm family secure if they have not made a community a fit place in which to live. The benefits of electricity must reach, I think, out to the farthest dirt road there is, and wherever the lines go out people must go and take the story of what it means to be a member of a cooperative. If they are good, active, informed members of a cooperative, they are very apt to be good citizens. I am sure, Mr. Wickard, that REA is not going to be able to do this job alone, and since that is true and we all know it is true, who have worked

ALL
ALL

in this program, we must join hands with all of the groups of people and the individuals who are interested in building a better rural America.

I wonder a good many times how many people in this country, perhaps how many people even in this agency, realize the new wisdom that is being born in the minds and the hearts of rural people in this country. They see themselves now as able to call upon the Government to help them fill their needs -- their educational needs and housing needs and health needs and their community needs. I am not sure but I believe that this agency has helped to educate these people into a better knowledge of what they have in this agency and in their Government. This is one of the agencies which has brought the Government close to a large segment of our people. That is one of the wonders of the agency itself.

I am thinking right now of just a few of the people who long years ago had a vision of what rural America might be because they knew what its resources were. They knew what we had in our population, where we have drawn upon the good and the bad from every country in the world. They had faith and they had vision and together they have built something here that is not to be found in any other part of the world. We see it today working in the new thinking, the new desires and the new hopes that they have when they go to our Congress and ask for help in bringing all these new things about. They are not asking for charity but for help -- help on a scale so that we will in the future have rural America well housed and be able to fill their desires for health facilities, for good schools and good churches, and for people prepared to do their jobs all up and down the line.

I am not a prophet of doom by any manner of means. I could not have lived/as long and seen as much of this development in my life without being a confirmed optimist, and I think my work in this agency -- to have worked here with those who have dedicated their services to this particular job over a long period of years -- would give me faith not only in our people but in the agency in which they are working beyond anything which could have happened to me outside of the work in this agency.

When we take into consideration the fact that our enemies never sleep, it indicates to me that none of us must ever sleep too long. We must know who they are, and how they work, and what they have to work with, and then we will be better able to build our own bulwarks of defense. It is my belief that there is nothing, nothing at all, that is comparable to the informed and intelligent members of these cooperatives to bring strength and security to them, and while they are building that, they are building a rural America which the whole world will look at.

Emerson said that "History is very largely a matter of biographies." Now when I get old and decrepit and sit by the fire, I am going to say to myself, "Dear me, think of the wonderful people I have known. I knew this person, and I knew that person -- Morris Cooke, Mr. Carmody, Mr. Slattery, Mr. Wickard, Doctor Person, George Long, John Asher,

Mary Payne, Corinne Sutton." I knew the men and the women who have worked all these years in REA and no matter where I am or what I am doing I shall remember, with the greatest joy a human being can have, my association with the people of REA. You have been a grand lot of people and I am truly grateful -- truly grateful, down deep in my heart, for the opportunity to have been a small part of this organization, and I thank you very much.

#####

1022